



Understanding the Barriers to Tourism & Hospitality
Workforce Recovery and Building Toward Resilience:
Background Report

November 2022



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This report has been provided for the purposes of sharing the findings and lessons gained from a series of consultations conducted by MDB Insight (acquired by Deloitte) in addition to emerging insights, perspectives, and findings from the various activities conducted by OTEC, Blueprint and other partners¹. These activities include readiness assessments; surveying displaced workers and potential talent groups; understanding regional barriers to adoption of capacity-building resources & methodologies; field-testing tools; and launching a national communications campaign to address perceptions of the sector as an employer.

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¹ See project partners section for more details

Understanding the Barriers and Building Toward Resilience

This background report shares the findings and lessons learned alongside industry stakeholders and policymakers through the Tourism & Hospitality Emergency Recovery (THER) initiative. It serves as a reference of ideas, insights, solutions, and tools that can support the tourism industry's recovery and help shock-proof the industry against further disruption.



Introduction

Tourism & Hospitality Emergency Recovery ([THER](#)) is a national workforce initiative funded by the [Government of Canada's Future Skills Centre](#) and led by OTEC between May 2021 and September 2022. This initiative built on the previous work in 2020 that focused on emergency support for Ontario tourism and hospitality industry workers who were displaced during the COVID-19 pandemic.

THER aimed to scale workforce development collaboration and capacity-building approaches to support a more resilient Canadian tourism industry. The initiative was focused on building stakeholders' capacity to better recover from the effects of the COVID-19 crisis and at the same time, better prepare for, plan, and adapt to future crises.

Tourism and hospitality is a broad sector critical to the economy, comprised of five distinct but related industry groups: accommodation; food and beverage services; recreation and entertainment; transportation; and travel services. In support of the THER work², OTEC managed initiative phases and Blueprint facilitated research. Deloitte led stakeholder facilitation³ and the development of this reference document.



² A full list of project partners is provided at the end of this report.

³ Details found under the Understanding the Barriers to Recovery and Resiliency Challenges and Solutions section of this background report.

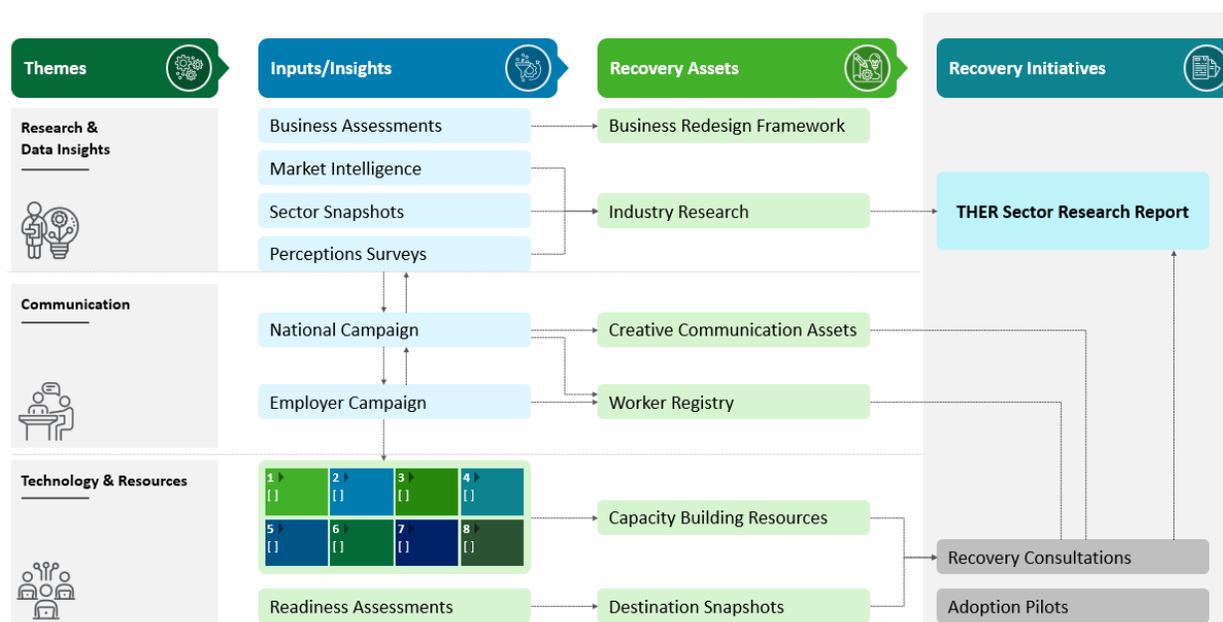
Approach of the THER Project

THER builds resilience by providing access to regional and virtual employment services, connecting workers with employment and relief supports, and advocating on behalf of workers, particularly vulnerable individuals including youth, women, and newcomers to Canada. Since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, tourism and hospitality continues to be among the hardest-hit sectors with regards to employment challenges.

In response, THER set out to test an approach to enhance industry resilience. Feedback was gathered from multiple industry leaders on the barriers and challenges to recovery. The project developed a playbook of resources and capacity-building tools that could address those challenges. Much of this work helped uncover the findings and lessons learned in this report.

The figure below maps the flow of the various activities and outputs that were developed.

Figure 1: THER Activities and Outputs



Source: OTEC (Ontario Tourism Education Corporation)

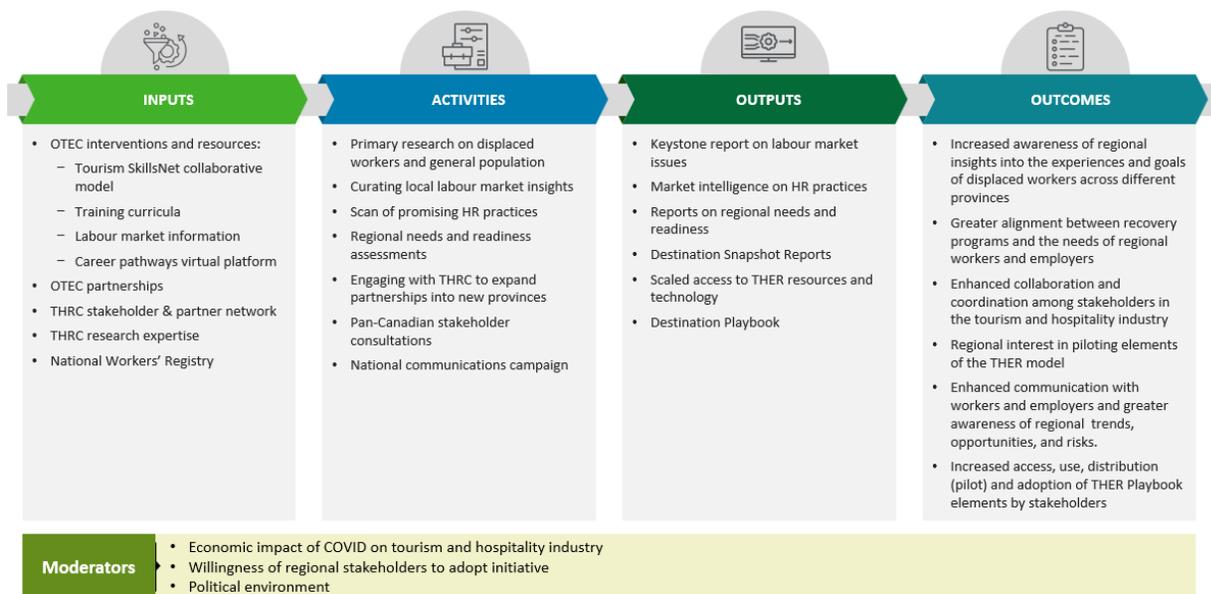
Methodology and Approach

This report highlights many of the lessons learned through the THER initiative which adopted a multi-faceted and nuanced recovery approach (see Logic Model below). Various activities were conducted under the THER initiative including:

- Readiness assessments
- Surveying displaced workers and potential sources of talent
- Understanding regional barriers to the adoption of capacity-building resources and methodologies
- Field-testing tools, and launching a national communications campaign to address perceptions of the sector as an employer

This work was done to inform comprehensive resilience planning across this diverse and widespread sector.

Figure 2: Logic Model



Source: OTEC (Ontario Tourism Education Corporation)

Key Stakeholder Groups

This report includes references to challenges faced by, and solutions that can be employed for the following target groups:

- Funders and policy managers
- Senior managers from federal and provincial industry associations (e.g., TIAC⁴, HAC⁵, THRC⁶, TIAO⁷, ORHMA⁸)
- Tourism-focused organizations across the country, e.g., Ontario-equivalent Regional Tourism Organizations (RTOs), and Provincial and Regional Destination Management/Marketing Organizations (DMOs)
- Employers and consultants engaged in sector workforce strategy and planning in their regions

This report calls for improved collaboration in conjunction with the findings and lessons learned. To move the sector forward, stakeholders must continue to collaborate and act to:

- Ensure that workforce recovery investments and strategies are informed by multi-level consultations and are designed based on the unique needs of local businesses and stakeholders.
- Ensure engagement and partnership development are based on clear and transparent reciprocity and that local business and industry stakeholders are recognized for their expertise and influence within their given markets and communities.
- Ensure that workforce attraction and retention efforts extend beyond messaging and campaigns to address the workplace experience itself.
- Address the negative perceptions of the industry at every level with an aligned set of voices.

⁴ Tourism Industry Association of Canada

⁵ Hotel Association of Canada

⁶ Tourism HR Canada

⁷ Tourism Industry Association of Ontario

⁸ Ontario Restaurant Hotel & Motel Association

Current State of the Sector

While total employment across the Canadian economy has recovered to pre-pandemic levels, the tourism sector continues to feel the prolonged impact of the employment suppression experienced in 2020 and 2021.

Canada's tourism industry was experiencing significant growth prior to the onset of the global COVID-19 pandemic. In 2019, the industry accounted for over two million workers, and it was projected that 504,000 jobs would need to be filled between 2015 and 2035 to match labour demand.⁹ It was expected that the labour force would not be able to supply the full complement of workers required, leaving 93,000 of these expected new jobs unfilled.¹⁰



With the pandemic came national and international policies that enacted travel restrictions, business closures, and other public health measures to protect the health care system from becoming overwhelmed. These restrictions were beyond the control of the tourism industry and caused a severe decline in the demand for tourism products. Demand for domestic tourism within Canada is expected to recover to pre-pandemic levels by 2024, while 2025 is the earliest estimated timeframe for international tourism demand to recover to 2019 levels.¹¹

These public health measures had a negative impact on employment within the tourism industry as temporary and permanent layoffs increased and overall career prospects become ambiguous. In 2020, during the height of the pandemic, employment in tourism fell to 1.6 million workers – more than 450,000 fewer than 2019 – and the number of active tourism businesses in Canada rapidly fell by 22%.¹² By 2021, employment rose just 2.2% to 1.7 million workers.¹³

The THER perception survey¹⁴ of the general population found that Canadians had a positive perception of tourism as a place of employment and an economic driver in the country, and that 65% of respondents would recommend a career in tourism to family and friends.¹⁵ While overall perceptions of the tourism industry are positive, 42% of survey respondents reported that their perceptions have become more negative since the beginning of the pandemic.¹⁶

The large drop in employment and declining perceptions of the tourism industry have displaced many in the tourism workforce as they looked for and found careers in other sectors of the economy. As public health restrictions have lifted, the Canadian economy has recovered, and the total workforce and

⁹ The Conference Board of Canada. (2019). *The Future of Canada's Tourism Sector, Bottom Line: Growth Aspirations Face Labour Challenges*. Report prepared for Tourism HR Canada. November 2019. Analysis based on inflation-adjusted 2012 dollars.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Destination Canada, June 2021 Visitor Economy Forecast.

¹² Adapted from Statistics Canada, Labour Force Survey, customized tabulations.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ The survey was conducted in 2022 and had 2,502 total responses.

¹⁵ OTEC, Tourism HR Canada, *The Impacts of COVID-19 on the Tourism Workforce in Canada*, May 2022.

¹⁶ Ibid.

unemployment rate have recovered to pre-pandemic levels. This has meant a decrease in the labour pool from which tourism operators can hire and an increase in the competition for labour.

Stakeholders across the board continue to be concerned that displaced workers may not return to the industry, even with the easing of restrictions. This will lead to continued labour shortages for operators as increasing demand for their tourism services will require additional staff. The economic impact of the employment losses and its mark on the perception of a career in tourism will continue to act as a significant restraint on the sector's recovery efforts.

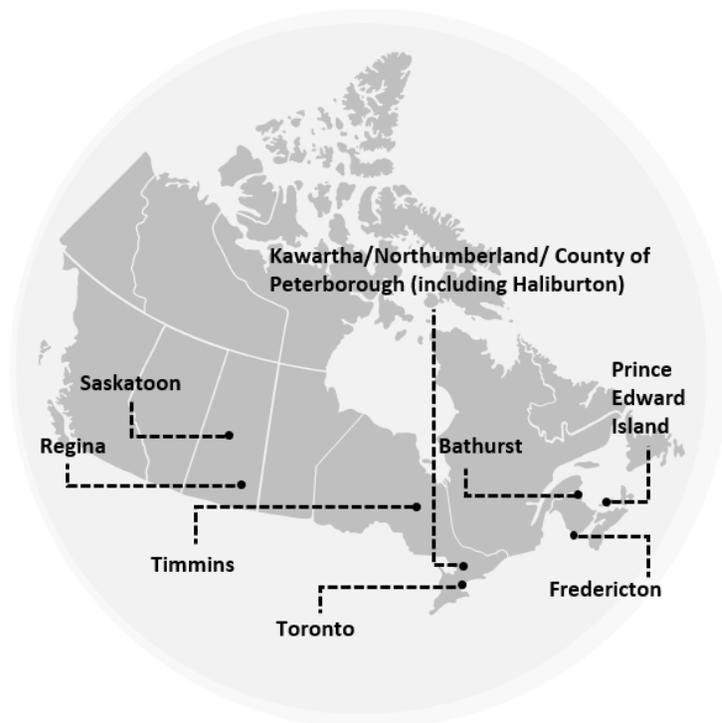


Understanding the Barriers to Recovery

As the sector works towards becoming more resilient to future economic shocks, Blueprint and OTEC explored the national trends and economic data in different rural and urban regions to better understand their needs moving forward.

OTEC and Deloitte facilitated sessions with industry stakeholders who expressed interest in getting involved with the initiative. This provided stakeholders an opportunity to discuss the specific barriers to recovery in their region. Figure 3 highlights the regions that were consulted as part of this process. The following section highlights key regional insights and findings from the Readiness Assessment and facilitated consultations.

Figure 3: Stakeholder Consultation Map



Readiness Assessments

Between February 1st and March 4th, 2022, Blueprint conducted virtual regional consultations with stakeholders from Saskatchewan, Ontario, and New Brunswick. Deloitte (formerly MDB Insight) supplemented this work by conducting interviews with stakeholders from Prince Edward Island. Those who participated in the interviews were primarily employers, government and tourism industry representatives, and economic development agencies. Through the regional consultations, stakeholders identified workforce development issues and ranked them based on regional priorities and their ability to implement solutions.

New Brunswick (Fredericton and Bathurst)¹⁷

Regional Insights

- **Demographics:** New Brunswick has a proportionately smaller, younger and core working age population (15 – 55 years) and proportionately larger older population compared to national averages. Fredericton is on par with the province, while in rural areas, such as Bathurst, these disparities are even more pronounced. There is an increasing trend of international immigration that can act as a pipeline to support the workforce.
- **Labour force dynamics:** Labour force participation and unemployment in Fredericton are on par with national averages. This suggests greater resilience against the pandemic's economic impacts in urban areas.
- **Environmental factors:** Affordable and accessible housing is an issue in New Brunswick.
- **Resources:** There is a high degree of coordination and collaboration among stakeholders in New Brunswick's tourism and hospitality ecosystem.

Key Regional Challenges

- **Lack of relevant data:** Inadequate local and up-to-date labour market insights and economic forecasting for the sector.
- **Declining perceptions:** Operators have limited options to address declining perceptions of the sector, leading to issues with worker attraction, re-attraction, and retention.
- **Reaching workers:** Inaccessible channels of communication or forums for employers and other stakeholders to reach tourism and hospitality workers.
- **Career guidance:** Lack of an integrated virtual platform to provide career advice and guidance to jobseekers.
- **Training and skills demand:** Training curricula are not keeping pace with changing skills demands.

Prince Edward Island¹⁸

Regional Insights

- **Demographics:** Prince Edward Island's population has an age distribution that is consistent with national averages. Steady increases in international immigration have led to rising population growth over the years, which suggests a strong foundation of working-age adults to support the economy.
- **Labour force dynamics:** Labour force participation in PEI is consistent with the national rate. The provincial unemployment rate is significantly higher than the national rate except for Charlottetown, suggesting low resiliency against economic impacts outside of the urban region.
- **Environmental factors:** There is an ongoing strategy to shift the cadence of the tourism and hospitality sector from seasonal towards year-round operations.

Key Regional Challenges

- **Declining perceptions:** Operators have limited options to address declining perceptions of the sector, leading to issues with worker attraction, re-attraction, and retention.
- **Navigating pivots:** Lack of tools and resources for operators to navigate the needed pivots and business strategy redesigns in the post-pandemic context.
- **Structural unemployment:** There are barriers in employment laws in the province that do not incentivize full-time seasonal work within the tourism sector.

Kawartha/Northumberland/County of Peterborough (including Haliburton), Ontario¹⁹

Regional Insights

- **Demographics:** The Kawartha Lakes region has a smaller population of younger people and a larger population of older adults compared to provincial and national averages.
- **Labour force dynamics:** Labour force participation is lower compared to provincial and national averages, with an older population that is less attached to the workforce.
- **Environmental factors:** Shifting seasonal patterns and behaviors; longer summers and shorter winters. Seasonal visitors are increasingly becoming permanent residents.
- **Infrastructure:** Broadband connectivity in rural areas is a persistent barrier in adapting to modern technologies and ways of working. Lack of housing availability is a key issue.

Key Regional Challenges

- **Lack of relevant data:** Inadequate local and up-to-date labour market insights and economic forecasting for the sector.
- **Declining perceptions:** Operators have limited options to address declining perceptions of the sector, leading to issues with worker attraction, re-attraction, and retention.
- **Training and skills demand:** Training curricula are not keeping pace with changing skills demands.
- **Communication:** There is a lack of clear messaging that highlights the benefits of a career in the tourism industry.

Toronto, Ontario²⁰

Regional Insights

- **Demographics:** The Toronto region has a proportionately larger adult population and smaller senior population compared to provincial and national averages.
- **Labour force dynamics:** Labour force participation is slightly higher compared to provincial and national averages, although unemployment has been impacted disproportionately.
- **Environmental factors:** Shifting audiences – stakeholders are focusing on residents and communities rather than attracting international visitors.
- **Resources:** Business owners find it overwhelming to navigate the landscape of available tools and resources.

Key Regional Challenges

- **Reaching workers:** Inaccessible channels of communication or forums for employers and other stakeholders hinder outreach to tourism and hospitality workers.
- **Lack of relevant data:** Inadequate local and up-to-date labour market insights and economic forecasting for the sector.
- **Declining perceptions:** Operators have limited options to address declining perceptions of the sector, leading to issues with worker attraction, re-attraction, and retention.

¹⁹ Adapted from Blueprint's THER Destination Snapshot Report for Kawartha/Northumberland/County of Peterborough (Including Haliburton), Ontario

²⁰ Adapted from Blueprint's THER Destination Snapshot Report for Toronto, Ontario

Timmins, Ontario²¹

Regional Insights

- **Demographics:** The Timmins region has a higher proportion of older adults compared to provincial and national averages. There is a net loss in overall population growth which limits its ability to support the sector.
- **Labour force dynamics:** Labour force participation and unemployment have both improved significantly and are now more favourable than provincial and national averages.
- **Environmental factors:** Sector workers have moved into Timmins' mining industry, which offers more stability and better pay. As well, agri-tourism is a small but growing subsector in the region.
- **Resources:** The sector in this region relies in part on volunteers (particularly for events). As well, the Rural and Northern Immigration Program offers an important source of talent.

Key Regional Challenges

- **Reaching workers:** Inaccessible channels of communication or forums for employers and other stakeholders hinder outreach to tourism and hospitality workers.
- **Declining perceptions:** Operators have limited options to address declining perceptions of the sector, leading to issues with worker attraction, re-attraction, and retention.
- **Training and skills demand:** Training curricula are not keeping pace with changing skills demands.

Saskatchewan (Saskatoon and Regina)²²

Regional Insights

- **Demographics:** Regina and Saskatoon have larger adult populations, with a smaller proportion of older adults compared to provincial and national averages. Both have significant international immigration to support a sustainable workforce.
- **Labour force dynamics:** Labour force participation is higher in both regions compared to provincial and national rates. In Regina, the unemployment rate is consistent with provincial/national averages, while it is slightly higher in Saskatoon.
- **Environmental factors:** Mid-level roles, including management and sales positions, have been particularly difficult to fill. Many workers left or were laid off from these positions and have found stable work in other sectors.

Key Regional Challenges

- **Reaching workers:** Inaccessible channels of communication or forums for employers and other stakeholders to reach tourism and hospitality workers.
- **Declining perceptions:** Operators have limited options to address declining perceptions of the sector, leading to issues with worker attraction, re-attraction, and retention.
- **Navigating pivots:** Lack of tools and resources for operators to navigate needed pivots and business strategy redesign in the post-pandemic context.
- **Coordination and collaboration:** Lack of coordination and collaboration among stakeholders in the local workforce development ecosystem for tourism and hospitality.

²¹ Adapted from Blueprint's THER Destination Snapshot Report for Timmins, Ontario

²² Adapted from Blueprint's THER Destination Snapshot Report for Regina and Saskatoon, Saskatchewan

Impact of Readiness Assessment - Saskatchewan

Saskatchewan was in a unique situation during the COVID-19 pandemic as businesses remained open and workers maintained their employment. Despite this, the province experienced the extreme shocks and challenges of the pandemic that impacted the nation's tourism and hospitality sector. In fact, the pandemic only exacerbated an existing worker shortage issue. As a result, Saskatchewan's tourism and hospitality sector elected to work with OTEC during Phase 2 of the THER initiative to address the issue.

Through collaboration with OTEC and pan-Canadian roundtables, different stakeholders from Saskatchewan were brought together to establish a common understanding of the sector's needs.

While stakeholders recognized that the sector faces a myriad of challenges and that all OTEC's playbook solutions would be valuable to support their work going forward, the shortage of workers was identified as the most pressing challenge. As a result, both [Hospitality Saskatchewan](#) and [Regina Work Prep Centre](#) were excited about the potential of **Career Atlas** for its ability to:

- Track an individual's journey into the hospitality and tourism sector
- Create stronger pathways for individuals to employment
- Leverage artificial intelligence (AI) to update available jobs, individuals' skills, and skills gaps
- Increase autonomy for job seekers to take ownership of their career journey
- Support individuals with systematic challenges (e.g., no work experience, living in poverty) to recognize their existing skillset and explore potential career opportunities

It is anticipated that a pilot of Career Atlas will be launched in late 2022 with Regina Work Prep.

Understanding of National and Regional Barriers

Understanding the challenges of recovery and building resilience for regions requires sound strategic planning and the ability to stack multiple activities to develop a comprehensive approach. Unique approaches to national challenges in each region are required to build resiliency across the industry. The Destination Snapshot Reports and subsequent facilitations identified barriers that are nationwide, specific to either urban or rural areas of the country, or relevant to different geographies. Below are the related highlights.

National Barriers to Recovery

From the facilitation sessions, several barriers to recovery were identified as pan-Canadian issues for the tourism sector. Among the most significant barrier is the declining workforce and the increased numbers of displaced workers who are choosing not to return to the tourism labour pool. Other notable issues affecting the tourism industry in regions across Canada are the declining perceptions of the industry as a place to establish a career, and the growing skills mismatch in the workforce compared to the requirements of the industry.

Urban vs Rural Approaches to Address Barriers to Recovery

At a high level, the challenges faced by urban and rural tourism operators are similar. A unique challenge identified by urban areas was a lack of communication between stakeholders that prevents the growth of a strong workforce development ecosystem. While the issues that affect urban and rural areas are similar, each region will require a unique approach when creating solutions.

Geographic Approaches to Address Barriers to Recovery

Barriers to recovery vary widely by region. Challenges faced by Atlantic Canada include a lack of navigational tools and resources to operate in a post-pandemic world, and a lack of a virtual platforms to provide career advice to its workforce. Western Canada's challenges include insufficient coordination to develop a strong ecosystem for workforce development. Central Canada's challenges are common across the country and include poor labour market insights, difficulties in attracting and retaining workforce, insufficient training curricula to keep up with skills demand, and difficulty communicating with the workforce.

Unpacking Resiliency

Canada's tourism industry faces challenges at both the national and regional levels. Workforce issues such as the growing skills mismatch or a shortfall in labour supply are challenging to solve from a national perspective as most of the funding and oversight for training belongs to provincial organizations who utilize unique approaches for their region.* There also needs to be further attention given to address challenges regionally, given the differing trends and demographic realities across Canada.

Through the challenges that the tourism sector has faced since early 2020, operators and stakeholders have demonstrated their resiliency by utilizing supports such as the Canadian Emergency Wage Subsidy to maintain employment in the industry. Many operators had less than 25% of their usual revenue during the pandemic and were continuing to search for new labour pools to address the shortfall of workers.**

OTEC has developed a playbook to foster resiliency and provide supports around the challenges facing Canada's tourism industry. This playbook can be adapted to meet the unique needs of each region.

* OTEC, Tourism HR Canada, The Impacts of COVID-19 on the Tourism Workforce in Canada, May 2022.

** Tourism HR Canada. (2021). COVID-19 Tourism Workforce and Business Conditions Survey, Wave One, January – February, 2021.



Foundations to Build On

Recognizing the challenges faced by tourism and hospitality sectors across Canada, OTEC has designed a toolkit in collaboration with partners to provide tangible solutions for stakeholders within the tourism sector.

By using economic data and perceptions research to understand the barriers faced by the tourism sector, OTEC developed toolkit solutions to address problems being faced within the industry. As part of the regional facilitation that informed the gathering of data on trends and challenges noted in previous sections of this report, stakeholders provided their perspective on the key supports and gaps existing in their region. The following sets the stage for tangible solutions relevant to different stakeholder groups²³ and regions.



²³ Many stakeholders can benefit from these solutions. Specific takeaways relevant to key stakeholder groups (Funders and policy managers, Senior managers from federal and provincial industry associations, Tourism-focused organizations, Provincial and Regional Destination Management/Marketing Organizations and Employers and consultants) are referenced in the following sub-sections.

Our Toolkit for Sector Recovery

The following chart outlines the tourism workforce challenges being faced across the country, which stakeholder groups are most affected, and the solutions available from THER to support sector recovery. More details on each of these toolkit solutions, including relevant regions and stakeholders, are provided on page 17 under Toolkit Breakdown.

Figure 4: Tourism Workforce Challenges and Solutions²⁴



Tourism Workforce Challenges	Federal and provincial industry associations	Tourism-focused organizations	Funders and policy managers	Employers and consultants	Solutions
Destinations need local real-time labour market information and economic forecasting data for decision-making.	✓	✓	✓		Real-time Tourism Revenue Forecasting Platform (Destination Dynamics)
Employment and workforce training partners need virtual delivery infrastructure to support job seekers.	✓	✓			Community for Tourism & Hospitality Workers (Workers Registry)
Displaced workers are losing attachment to the tourism and hospitality industry.	✓	✓	✓	✓	AI-based Labour Market Navigation & Employment Platform (Career Atlas)
Workers have drifted away from the sector which is resulting in the loss of a talented and engaged workforce.	✓	✓	✓	✓	Curated Employer and Employee Driven Training
Small and medium operators need tools to make strategic sustainability pivots to adapt to the new normal.			✓	✓	Strategic Business Assessment Tool
Concerns that displaced workers will not return to the sector – poor image of tourism as a career choice.	✓	✓		✓	Career Awareness Campaign and Toolkit
Tourism workforce recovery is a dynamic challenge, requiring data, communications, technology, and a range of stakeholders all working together with a single vision.	✓	✓	✓	✓	Strategic Workforce Planning

²⁴ Note: Solutions include hyperlinks to sections within this document for easy access to additional details.

Toolkit Breakdown

The challenges discussed in the following section have been captured from Blueprint’s Destination Snapshot Reports and subsequent facilitation sessions across Canada. Solutions are based on lessons learned from initiatives by OTEC and THER to date. They address root causes of issues and have been presented to be adaptable to market needs to ensure that they can be successfully implemented by target groups.

Tourism Workforce Challenge: Destinations have limited access to local, timely, and relevant economic and labour market information for decision-making.



Stakeholder groups that are best suited to utilize the solution:

- Federal and provincial industry associations
- Tourism-focused organizations
- Workforce planning and coordination bodies

OTEC Solution - Real-time Tourism Revenue and Forecasting Platform (Destination Dynamics): A new Economic Impact data model was developed in collaboration with the Conference Board of Canada to deliver real-time, local, revenue and labour forecasting. The model offers data insights on tourism revenue, employment and expenditure activity, impact on gross domestic product and more, to support local development strategies and industry resilience. The following is a sample of relevant economic and labour market forecasts for Ontario.

Figure 5: Destination Dynamics: Real-time, Local, Economic and Labour Forecasting Model – Ontario Insights



Source: Destination Dynamics Forecast Model, March 2022, Q1

Tourism Workforce Challenge: Employment and workforce training partners need virtual delivery infrastructure to support job seekers.

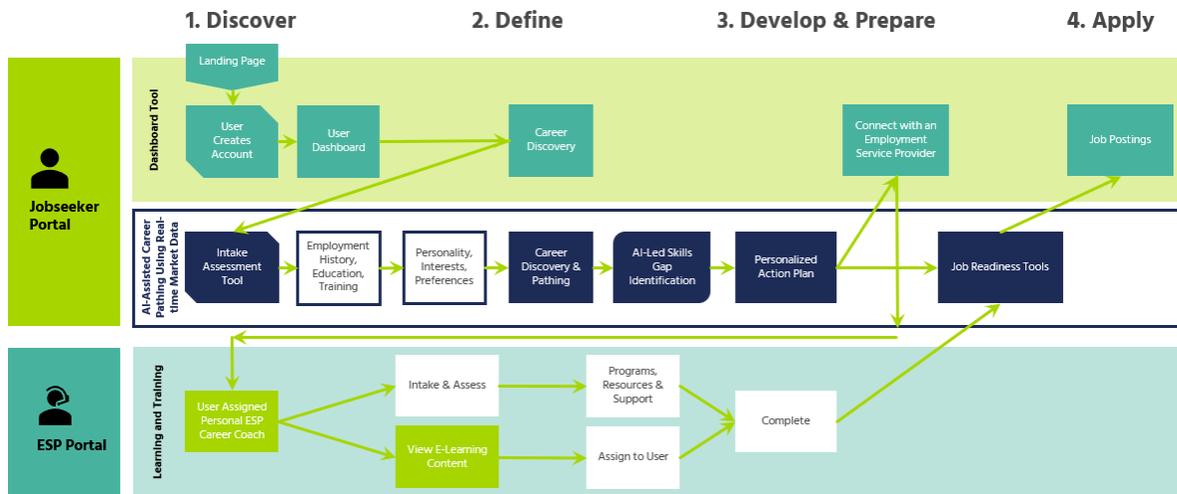


Stakeholder groups that are best suited to utilize the solution:

- Tourism-focused organizations
- Workforce planning and coordination bodies

Opportunity/Solution – Community for Tourism and Hospitality Workers (Workers’ Registry): THER developed a first-of-its-kind AI-based labour market navigation and employment platform. This virtual collaboration and service platform for jobseekers and employment service providers aids jobseekers to upskill, skills-match, and find employment.

Figure 6: Labour Market Navigation and Employment Platform Map



Source: THER Destination Recovery Playbook, October 2021.

Tourism Workforce Challenge: Displaced workers are losing attachment to the tourism and hospitality industry.

Opportunity/Solution – AI-based Labour Market Navigation & Employment Platform

(CareerAtlas): Training provider partnerships to facilitate single sign-in environments that reduce the barriers to completion for learners.



Stakeholder groups that are best suited to utilize the solution:

- Employers and consultants
- Funders and policy managers
- Workforce coordination and planning bodies

Tourism Workforce Challenge: Workers have drifted away from the sector which is resulting in the loss of a talented and engaged workforce.



Stakeholder groups that are best suited to utilize the solution:

- Tourism-focused organizations
- Employers and consultants
- Workforce coordination and planning bodies
- Funders and policy managers

Opportunity/Solution – Curated Employer and Employee Driven Training:

Develop an engagement hub for different stakeholders. The engagement hub should deliver the following:

- **For Employers:** Industry insights, knowledge mobilization, destination recovery information and an opportunity to provide input to the recovery planning process.
- **For Workers:** A way to join a registry for tourism and hospitality workers that offers educational resources and information, as well as insights from real people working in the sector.
- **For Youth:** How to start a career in tourism and hospitality, including: where to study, information on financial supports, and video testimonials from sector veterans on the opportunities for young people.
- **For Newcomers:** Demonstrating why tourism and hospitality is a career choice that will provide security and advancement.
- **For Project Partners:** A place to share research and insights, and work together on recovery.



Source: THER Destination Recovery Playbook, October 2021.

Tourism Workforce Challenge: Small and medium operators need tools to make strategic sustainability pivots to adapt to the new normal.



Opportunity/Solution - Strategic Business Assessment

Tool: A Business Redesign Framework prototype was developed and tested in partnership with the University of Guelph to help with Strategic Business Decisions. When complete, this tool will be used to leverage economic and labour market forecasting data to provide business-level revenue and operational diagnostics and identify pathways for business planning and recovery.

Stakeholder groups that are best suited to utilize the solution:

- Employers and consultants
- Funders and policy managers

Tourism Workforce Challenge: Concerns that displaced workers will not return to the sector – poor image of tourism as a career choice.



Opportunity/Solution – Career Awareness Campaign

and Toolkit: A national marketing campaign to improve perceptions and awareness of roles and career paths. The marketing campaign components would target workers and youth, with a focus on equity seeking or marginalized individuals.

THER's successful marketing campaign included:

- Creative campaign concept focused on workers and businesses
- A compelling website with clear strategic goals (registry, sector attraction, knowledge sharing, etc.)
- Multiple campaign videos and sponsored content for various platforms created excitement, drove traffic to the campaign website, and encouraged registration
- Video interviews with real people from the sector were used in marketing campaigns and across digital platforms to build connections
- Online training content that workers could access once they joined the community

Stakeholder groups that are best suited to utilize the solution:

- Tourism-focused organizations
- Employers and consultants

Effectiveness of Marketing Communication Initiative - National

Recognizing the growing need across Canada for more hospitality and tourism staff and the importance of consistent and cohesive messaging from all tourism and hospitality bodies, OTEC launched a **THER National Marketing Campaign called Let's Get Ready**. Working in collaboration with 12 sector organizations,* OTEC developed and executed on a compelling campaign that included print and digital media, and video assets. These materials highlighted real-life stories from a diversity of people in the hospitality and tourism sector and ultimately directed the user to <https://letsgetready.ca/for-workers/>.

Partners appreciated OTEC's collaborative process by hosting bi-weekly meetings to share opinions and feedback to help direct the design of the messaging to best resonate with their target audience. These meetings also provided partners the opportunity to connect with each other and leverage their own resources and connections to support OTEC and other partners in their marketing campaigns.

Organizations noted that the materials generated in this project could be co-branded or rebranded and had similar engagement as their own communications, which was seen to be driven by the clear messaging and OTEC's ability to tailor the content to the stage and current climate of the sector (e.g., focusing on training during the shut-down, and hiring when reopening). These materials also allowed partners to reallocate some of their internal funding to other campaigns throughout the year to strengthen their reach and impact, which was greatly appreciated.

When asked whether a similar model should be implemented in the future, partners unanimously saw value in this form of collaboration and consistency of resources and looked forward to greater collaboration and knowledge sharing in the future.

* TIAC, TIAO, ORHMA, Culinary Tourism Alliance, Resorts of Ontario, Indigenous Tourism Ontario, Marriott, Hospitality Workers Training Centre, Restaurants Canada, Tourism Industry Association of New Brunswick, Tourism Saskatchewan, and Tourism Industry Association of Prince Edward Island

Tourism Workforce Challenge: Tourism workforce recovery is a dynamic challenge, requiring data, communications, technology, and a range of stakeholders all working together with a single vision.



Opportunity/Solution – Strategic Workforce Planning: THER supports participating destinations with consulting, data, infrastructure and proven frameworks to help build innovative recovery strategies that are adapted to local realities and responsive to a rapidly changing market. This allows support organizations to harness the unique expertise, perspectives, and knowledge of diverse groups to increase operator capacity. Successful frameworks offer resources in a single, coordinated way that provide economies of scale to stakeholders who would not otherwise have access to them.

Stakeholder groups that are best suited to utilize the solution:

- Federal and provincial industry associations
- Tourism-focused organizations
- Workforce coordination and planning bodies

Figure 7: Example Framework - Tourism SKILLSNET Framework



Source: THER, Destination Recovery Playbook, January 2022.

Preparing to Thrive

While OTEC and the THER partners have made substantial progress in developing tools that provide solutions to issues that are facing the sector, it is recognized that a thriving tourism sector will require support and collaboration from all stakeholders.



Additional shifts in the recovery efforts will require organizations to adapt their existing strategies to the new reality they are facing. This should be guided by research, data insights and consultations with regional stakeholders, including grassroots organizations, to ensure that changes made will have the intended impact.

National organizations can provide critical resources to support a thriving tourism ecosystem. These organizations often have broad mandates, and their impact can be dramatically amplified through formal, coordinated, provincial and territorial partnerships.

Provincial and territorial organizations have the mandate, authority, and responsibility to coordinate regional strategies with their stakeholders as well as to work with regional policy makers, funders, and community partners to implement solutions. They are well-versed in the challenges being faced by operators in their region and are strongly positioned to leverage the support of national partners to provide services and deploy regionally adapted resources such as real-time, local, labour market insights.

Preparing and planning for increased sector resiliency requires organizations at every level to work together collaboratively. There is an opportunity to promote greater visibility and stronger coordination for stacked initiatives from national, provincial / territorial and regional organizations. National organizations can provide financial and other high-level supports in conjunction with grassroots and regional organizations who have a strong grasp on the unique barriers and issues within their boundaries. By stacking initiatives and working together, synergies can be found that can increase regional and national prosperity.

Continuous Engagement and Implementation of THER

With the conclusion of the THER project, the tools and strategies developed continue to drive innovative change. OTEC continues to engage with federal, provincial, and local organizations to integrate these innovative tools and approaches into the Canadian Tourism and Hospitality workforce industry. Leveraging the existing data-driven digital infrastructure developed as part of THER, OTEC is working with Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) on a new Newcomers GPS project. Its goal is to improve newcomers' settlement journey in Canada by using CareerAtlas. Destination Dynamics has also received investment from the Province of Ontario to enable more efficient customization for regional organizations. The model has been highly valuable to partners in Ontario, with OTEC currently working with multiple stakeholders to help use this tool to support recovery planning across the [TSNO Alliance](#).

Call to Action

The ecosystem must continue to strengthen the ability of the tourism and hospitality sector to recover and to be ready to respond and bounce back when disruptions hit. While there is work to be done by four groups of stakeholders, the key to the future is more collaboration.

Tourism workforce development, collaboration, and capacity-building approaches must exist to support a more resilient Canadian tourism industry. Given the THER sector tools mentioned in this report can be adapted to different regional needs and used by different stakeholder groups, they introduce opportunities for potential partners to overcome similar challenges together. Below are some key areas of focus for critical stakeholders within the tourism industry that, if implemented in a collaborative and inclusive manner, can provide ways to improve recovery efforts across Canada.

Funders and Policy Managers

There is a need to ensure that workforce recovery investments and strategies are informed by multi-level consultations and are designed based on the unique needs of local businesses and stakeholders. There is an urgent need for continued investment in the sector, building on the work that is already underway to support impacted businesses, protect livelihoods, and realize the economic opportunities forecasted over the next five years.

Funders and policy managers must continue to keep their finger on the pulse of regions to maintain an understanding of the industry's needs. Rapidly changing labour markets demand room for more agile project methodologies and contractual outcomes in the funding environment. By effectively layering research, consultation, intervention design and evaluation, workforce innovation projects can bring both knowledge and solutions to the market far more quickly. Supporting the unique workforce needs of small owner-operators is time- and resource-intensive when compared to corporate workforce development partnerships. Programming designed to support small business clusters is crucial to the future success of tourism in Canada. Funding and support for programming of this kind is needed for this critical segment of the economy, particularly in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Federal and Provincial Industry Associations

Federal and provincial industry associations must leverage their relationships with provincial/territorial partners to support grassroots organizations and regional players. These organizations should embrace their unique capability to bring stakeholders together from across Canada, both in the tourism industry and from other sectors, to share and leverage knowledge and expertise between provinces/territories and regions that can push the industry forward. Negative perceptions of the industry must be addressed at every level with a coherent and aligned set of voices. Career awareness programs are launching across Canada and collaboration frameworks must be developed to help cascade the industry's message clearly at each level.

Tourism-focused Organizations

Tourism-focused organizations need to ensure engagement and partnership development is based upon clear and transparent reciprocity and that local businesses and industry stakeholders are recognized for their expertise and influence within their given markets and communities. These organizations should focus on providing businesses and destinations the local data and forecasting they need in real time to support recovery planning and critical business decisions. Tourism-focused organizations can also spend time with local businesses to understand their needs and provide insights into proven and trusted solutions that are customizable and impactful. These organizations should continue to share best practices, champion grassroots engagement, consultation, and coordination, while pursuing broader collaboration and partnerships that can accelerate recovery strategies.

Employers and Consultants

Employers and consultants must remain engaged in developing and executing sector workforce strategies in their regions to further build capacity within the sector. As employers and consultants continue building their relationships with all levels of government and other tourism organizations, opportunities arise to share knowledge and inform new policies and funding mechanisms. Small business networks can also achieve the market intelligence, resources, and economies of scale enjoyed by their larger corporate counterparts by plugging into their local workforce strategies and coordination structures.

A two-way relationship is needed between all parties to provide current information on what they are experiencing in the market, ensure their needs are heard, and receive the tools and resources from others in the ecosystem to ensure future success. This is particularly important as worker attraction and retention is needing to extend beyond messaging and campaigns to address the workplace experience itself. Training opportunities must keep pace with worker and employer demands.

Final Thoughts

There is action and work to be done and the solution is not one that a single organization can lead alone. Collective efforts are needed to achieve a collective impact. Now is the time to take advantage of these findings and build stakeholders' capacity to better recover from the effects of the COVID-19 crisis and, at the same time, better prepare for, plan, and build resiliency for the future. The findings and lessons to date set the stage for future efforts and a road map to development.



Project Partners

Project Lead



Project Funders



Research and Technical Advisory Partners



Provincial Partners



Data Modelling Partner



Technology Solution Partners



Communications Partners



Business Diagnostics Partner



Field Testing Partner



Reference Documents

- Blueprint, THER Destination Snapshot Report, Bathurst, New Brunswick, March 2022. (Page 4)
- Blueprint, THER Destination Snapshot Report, Fredericton, New Brunswick, March 2022. (Pages 4,7,14-15)
- Blueprint, THER Destination Snapshot Report, Prince Edward Island. (Pages 4,7,12,14)
- Blueprint, THER Destination Snapshot Report, Timmins, Ontario, March 2022. (Pages 4,7,12-13)
- Blueprint, THER Destination Snapshot Report, Toronto, Ontario, March 2022. (Pages 4,6,12-13)
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